

for this purpose, and complained when the money was employed in garrisoning our few remaining castles in France.¹

The series of petitions presented in Parliament, from which this gloomy picture of naval and commercial decline has been drawn, emanated from the borough members. While leaving affairs of State to the knights of the shire, they were loud enough in complaints that concerned the immediate interests of their class, and they had long been accustomed to influence and sometimes to dictate the economic legislation of the government. The petitions that concern rural life and institutions may, on the other hand, be supposed to represent the feelings of the knights of the shires.

One of the questions that most vexed the smaller landowners, was the appointment of the sheriff of the county. This officer, chosen by the Crown from among the gentry of the district, was the link between Westminster and the countryside. He had once carried on almost all the King's business in the shire, and though many of his powers had since been delegated to the Justices of the Peace or to the King's Judges on circuit, he still remained the most important local officer. In the Good Parliament, and during the succeeding decade, the Commons again and again petitioned that all sheriffs might be removed at the end of every year. The objection of the knights of the shire to the long tenure of office by the same man was double. In the first place, as the sheriff's office was expensive and ruinous to men of small means, the knights felt sorry for persons of their own rank and class who were burdened with it several years together. Secondly, prolonged power tempted sheriffs of small estate, who had much to gain and little to forfeit, to practise extortion on their neighbours, to the great disease and oppression of the counties.² Real as was the grievance, the remedy proposed by the Commons was crude. To force the King to find an entirely new set of sheriffs every year would have been, as the Chancellor said in reply to the petition, inconvenient. The solution of the difficulty came rather by the delegation of the sheriff's powers to the Justices of the Peace, a process already begun and gradually completed in the course of the next two

¹ iii. 34. » *Ibid.* ii. 8&1-5, 857, iii. 62, 96, 174, 201.